

CHAPTER 1: Introduction



Welcome to the 2010 update of the town of Stow's Master Plan, published in the spring of that year. We also encourage you to visit the town's website, www.stow-ma.gov, for electronic copies of this report along with larger-scale versions of maps and other graphics.

Just as with a business plan that company leaders might draw up, a Master Plan sets out goals as clearly as possible with the

intent of creating benchmarks and guideposts. These goals help gauge where we are going and where we want to go, and remind local leaders of what the residents' priorities are. Establishing goals and priorities at the outset provides us with a way to monitor our own progress.

A. Master Plan Requirements

The requirements for a Master Plan are established in Massachusetts General Law (MGL) Chapter 41 Section 81D. In a somewhat unusual situation, Stow's Town Charter, Section 7.7c, adopted in May of 1991, requires its Master Plan to be updated every five years. Updating a Master Plan provides a community with a formal avenue through which to make regularly scheduled assessments of its progress, both in terms of reviewing the effectiveness of development decisions and in terms of satisfying the priorities the town has established for itself

FIGURE: 1 Excerpt from Town Charter

THIS DOCUMENT IS FOR REFERENCE ONLY. THE TOWN CLERK MAINTAINS THE OFFICIAL RECORD.

held in accordance with Section 2-5(a) during the year following the year in which it is appointed.

(c) Master Plan Committee: The Master Plan shall be reviewed at the direction of the Planning Board every five years, and a Master Plan Committee shall be appointed two years before the next update is due. The Board of Selectmen shall appoint a special committee of seven members comprised of a member of the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Board of Health, the Conservation Commission, and the Finance Committee and two Stow voters at large, who are not members of the above named boards.

The appointed committee shall present a final report to the Planning Board and said report shall include a Master Plan or updates to any existing Master Plan as required by Chapter 41 of the General Laws. The committee shall be discharged six months after the Master Plan or Master Plan updates have been presented to the Planning Board.

(d) If the Board of Selectmen so approves, any review committee appointed hereunder may retain counsel to assist in its review and expend such funds as may be appropriated.

In Stow, the predominant challenge is to balance the goal of diversity – as it relates to both housing and demographics – with the wish not to fundamentally alter our small-town heritage and rural character. It is difficult to pursue development to accommodate the desired diversity and economic

growth without compromising the equally important priority of land conservation. Only by soliciting input from as diverse a range of voices as possible can we ensure that we have met the town's needs to the best of our ability.

Therefore, we revise our Master Plan based on feedback from key constituencies including the Open Space Committee, the Recreation Commission, the Planning Board, the Board of Health, the Conservation Commission, the Board of Selectmen, the town's various housing groups, the School Committee, town and municipal employees including the police and Fire Chiefs and the head of the Highway Department, other ad-hoc committees and residents. In doing so, we attempt to create a fixed set of benchmarks against which future decisions can be weighed and future priorities examined.

This 2010 update is laid out in a topical format. Each chapter is devoted to a different component of planning with an emphasis on the major statutory elements of a Master Plan. Those nine statutory elements, as defined in MGL Chapter 41, Section 81D, are as follows:

- **Goals and Policies** - Public process
- **Land Use Plan** – Existing zoning and desired development patterns
- **Housing** – Desired type, quality, density and affordability, neighborhood considerations
- **Economic Development** - appropriate development locations
- **Natural and Cultural Resources** – Historic preservation, heritage landscapes, and cultural resources
- **Open Space and Recreation** - Natural resource protection, recreation facilities
- **Municipal Services and Public Facilities** – Capital planning and municipal funded services
- **Transportation** – Circulation, mobility, transit, parking
- **Plan Implementation**

When MGL Ch. 41 § 81D was first adopted, personal computers, graphic design, and the digital age of mapping and photography had not yet made their way into the typical workplace. Thus, municipal planning back in the 1960s and 1970s was much more rudimentary. Echoing the sophistication made available by better technology and available data, standards have evolved to include ever increasing planning expectations. Master Plans have thus become increasingly complex.

In addition, state and federal agencies have responded in turn with greater requirements on what a municipality is expected to produce for various plans that require state certification. For instance, the Department of Energy and Environmental Affairs has explicit guidelines for Open Space Plans which, if not met, prevent the community from being eligible for certain grants. Similarly, in order to receive School Building Assistance funds, communities must undergo predevelopment plans consistent with the Massachusetts School Building Authority requirements. A final example includes the Housing Production Plan, which is certified by the

Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) if it complies with their guidelines. Approved Housing Production Plans provide the community with greater authority and control over proposed developments.

A Master Plan, when approached as a stand-alone document without the benefit of any existing municipal plans, can take years to produce and cost a community a significant amount of money for technical assistance. However, when a community already has many of the topical components available, the community can and should draw on the existing plans, especially those that have been certified by the appropriate state agency. Stow is in the enviable position of having several of its plans recently produced and adopted by the state. Thus, this Master Plan update does not attempt to replace or replicate those documents. Instead, this Master Plan is generally filling the function of augmenting existing plans and filling in content where none is available.

Again, as mentioned above, Stow has done a fair amount of local planning, and this document draws on the themes, and conclusions of those existing plans that are current and comprehensive. Existing plans recently produced by the town of Stow that should be noted include:

Plan Name	Date	Certified By	Prepared By	Web Link
Open Space and Recreation – “Stow Forever Green”	6/08	EOEEA	Open Space and Recreation Committee	
School Master Plan – “Stow Public Schools”	5/07	School Building Assistance Bureau	SMMA	
Housing Production Plan	2009	Pending	Karen Sunnarborg Consulting, SMAHT	

Other planning studies and projects that contributed to the development of this plan include:

- **Master Plan "Stow 2000" - May 1996**
- **Stow Historic House Inventory**
- **Community Development Plan - 2004**
- **"Housing Choice - A Housing Plan for Stow"**
- **Mixed Use Zoning Project - 2005**
- **Visual Preference Survey – 2005**
- **Land Use Task Force Final Report – 2009**
- **Recreation Department Master Plan – 2007**
- **Heritage Landscape “Stow Reconnaissance Report”, prepared by Mass. Department of Conservation and Recreation & Freedom’s Way Heritage Area**

To obtain copies of these reports, please inquire with the Planning Department.

Despite drawing heavily on the above plans for content, one critical distinction should be made. Because the Master Plan must attempt to balance a series of competing needs and demands, goals and their relative priority may in some places deviate slightly from the priorities laid out in plans produced through other venues. Since we live and operate in a system that has limited financial and physical resources, sometimes the priorities we set and choices we ultimately make will inevitably come into conflict with other equally valid goals. For example, although recreation proponents might wish to use open land for new sports fields, housing specialists might prefer to develop affordable housing on that same parcel, while open space proponents will advocate for preserving the land in its pristine condition.

While the Master Plan attempts to take all of these needs into consideration, it cannot realistically predict or prescribe all of the actions that will occur in future years. Rather, it sets out a road map and lays out a framework in which to evaluate future municipal decisions. It identifies what the community values and provides a long-term vision going. It is, however, ultimately just a document, and the Master Plan cannot implement itself. Thus, the final chapter in this document highlights implementation strategies with specific actions items, a timeline, and the municipal entity primarily responsible for that goal.

Notwithstanding the Master Plan's attempt to set priorities, change, where it is driven by municipal action and not from outside pressures, will primarily be implemented by the actions of Town Meeting, which must vote on all appropriations and all zoning changes. Therefore, it is critical for residents to stay engaged, attend public meetings, and participate in local voting opportunities if they want to advance the goals of this Master Plan.

This document can serve as a valuable tool for all elected and appointed boards and committees in guiding their policy decisions and in influencing their priorities. New board and committee members are encouraged to familiarize themselves with this plan and to read related attachments and appendices where appropriate. The town will endeavor to post progress updates on its website once the plan moves from the paper to implementation phase, and all residents are encouraged to stay engaged.

B. Vision Statement

The Master Plan attempts to express a longer-term vision for the future of Stow. To help the town arrive at a general vision statement, the existing community values must first be examined and understood.

1. Values

When the question, "What do you value most about Stow?" is asked of a Stow resident, the most frequent answer is, "A sense of community consistent with its rural character." Our many open spaces and historic village settings contribute to Stow's rural character. Conservation lands, farms, orchards, and golf courses are the resources of Stow that provide and preserve this

rural character. We value our villages for their rich colonial and Victorian heritage and for the services they provide. We value those qualities that make Stow a wonderful place to live and raise a family. A strong sense of community, including involvement in our schools, churches, recreation, and social organizations and programs, provides opportunities for our children to excel and for adults to feel part of a supportive community.

Stow is far more than a collection of well-maintained houses where people sleep. Churches, civic institutions, governmental bodies, and volunteer organizations give Stow residents many different venues in which to get to know and appreciate their fellow citizens. Furthermore, that sense of community is aided by the fact that Stow has a rich mix of people of all ages from different economic strata.

These statements of value were derived in large part from comments received by planning participants and from data gathered and compiled over the past several years. The survey conducted by the Master Plan Committee (MPC) in the fall of 2008 indicated that overwhelmingly, residents generally want to preserve the existing character of the town. The full survey and its results appear in the Appendix. Policies for growth and protection of land must therefore reflect that desire within the context of what is presently possible under existing zoning.

2. Vision for Stow

The following vision has been derived from the statement of values, with significant weight given to the views expressed by the residents in various forums, through surveys, and an ongoing dialog with the community.

We envision a future in which Stow continues to place a high value on quality education, recreation, and agriculture. As a community, we will welcome diversity and place a high priority on providing housing that matches various ages and income levels. The need for economic growth will be balanced with maintaining a small-town feel. Recognizing the dual goals of physical fitness and community warmth, neighborhoods will be physically linked through a natural trail network and sidewalks. Through planning, Stow will maintain its rural character, ensure that the environment is protected by supporting the goals of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, and provide housing choices. Above all, the town will continue to ensure that its citizens have the highest possible quality of life.

That vision, along with the principles outlined below, helped to guide the Master Plan Committee in the creation of this document and played a significant role in the development of its recommendations.

C. Smart Growth and Principles for Sustainability

1. Explanation of “smart growth”

The state has a set of Smart Growth and Sustainable Development principles that it has promulgated and revises from time to time. However, in a community such as Stow, whose rural character dominates the landscape, not all of the state’s sustainable development principles are relevant or appropriate. Therefore, we have taken care to modify those concepts and mold them to be more suitable for Stow.

Smart growth is a principle of land development that emphasizes mixing land uses, increases the availability of a range of housing types in neighborhoods, takes advantage of compact design, and fosters distinctive and attractive communities. It preserves open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas; strengthens existing communities; provides a variety of transportation choices; makes development decisions predictable, fair, and cost-effective; and encourages community and stakeholder collaboration in development decisions.

Attractive village and town centers, vibrant residential neighborhoods, historic mill buildings, and fields, forests, and streams characterize Stow. Revitalizing and reinforcing these areas is a key smart growth strategy. A critical component of smart growth is identifying the areas that are appropriate for development and those that should be protected and preserved. Good candidates for development include Stow’s villages, as defined in Chapter 2.

2. Principles for sustainability

The state has worked hard to encourage planning and development that protect our natural resources, promote social and economic health and meet the needs of our residents. As a basic guide for local officials, developers, and citizens about what smart growth is, the Office for Commonwealth Development released a set of Sustainable Development Principles.

Based on these guidelines and adapted to meet Stow’s unique character, the Master Plan Committee recommends adoption of the following Sustainability Principles:

- **Redevelop first:** Revitalize existing neighborhoods in a way that doesn’t consume forest and fields, and find new uses for historic buildings and underutilized Brownfield sites, such as the Gleasondale Mill area.
- **Concentrate development:** Encourage compact development to conserve land and foster vibrant, walkable districts.
- **Be fair:** The benefits and burdens of development should be equitable and shared by all. We should work toward transparent and predictable permitting that will result in cost-effective and fair outcomes.
- **Restore and enhance the environment:** Promote the conservation, protection, and restoration of water, land, and cultural resources to provide a high quality of life and ecological health.

- **Conserve natural resources:** Encourage renewable energy and efficient use of building materials and water to contribute to a healthier environment that limits waste in a cost-effective fashion.
- **Expand housing opportunities:** Expand the number, affordability, and diversity of housing units to ensure that people of all abilities, income levels, and ages have appropriate housing options.
- **Provide transportation choice:** Look for ways to provide opportunities for public transit, walking, and biking.
- **Increase job opportunities:** Connect people with jobs in town or near their homes by expanding transportation infrastructure to enhance our economy.
- **Foster sustainable businesses:** Work to identify and promote new, innovative, environmentally friendly industries that contribute to the social, economic, and environmental health of our state.
- **Plan regionally:** Where possible, coordinate intermunicipal and regional planning to produce better outcomes that recognize that economic development, water, transportation, and housing are regional in nature; they don't stop at the town boundary.

3. Smart growth techniques for future development

We recommend the following smart growth techniques in planning for the future growth of Stow:

- **Village-style development:** Includes a variety of housing types, a mix of land uses, an active center, and a walkable design.
- **Open space residential design:** An approach to residential development that promotes open space preservation, based on environmental and social priority. It features partnership in development design between municipal officials and developers that provides innovative flexible incentives for highest marketability, mixed housing types and land uses, and minimal disturbance to the natural terrain.
- **Accessory dwelling units:** An accessory dwelling unit is a self-contained apartment in an owner-occupied single-family home that is either attached to the principal dwelling or in a separate structure on the same property. Accessory units (also known as accessory apartments, guest apartments, in-law apartments, family apartments, or secondary units) provide supplementary housing that can be integrated into existing single-family neighborhoods to provide a low-priced housing alternative with little or no negative impact on the character of the neighborhood.
- **District improvement financing (DIF) and tax increment financing (TIF):** District improvement financing (DIF) and tax increment financing (TIF) are economic tools that promote redevelopment by use of public/private

partnerships. TIF offers tax breaks to developers, while DIF channels tax dollars to targeted redevelopment districts.

- **Low impact development (LID):** Low impact development (LID) is a more sustainable land development pattern that results from a site planning process that first identifies critical natural resources, and then determines appropriate building envelopes. LID also incorporates a range of best management practices that preserve the natural hydrology of the land.
- **Inclusionary zoning:** Inclusionary zoning requires a portion of the housing units in certain real estate developments to be reserved as affordable to low and moderate-income households. It is an effective tool that can be used to ensure that adequate affordable units are included in the normal course of real estate development.
- **Preserving agricultural land and farming opportunities:** Preserving agricultural land and farming opportunities in Massachusetts has been a high priority for several decades. Through a variety of state and local initiatives, opportunities have emerged for agricultural preservation. Many communities have successfully preserved land and farming opportunities using a wide array of financial and legal tools.
- **Brownfields reuse:** The state is committed to the cleanup and redevelopment of Brownfield properties as a way to stimulate the economy and promote environmental protection goals. Several incentives are available to developers, including assistance with insurance and flexibility in remediation schedules.
- **Water resources:** Water is a finite resource that needs to be managed to meet current and future human needs, as well as those of the environment. Our approaches to water management must ensure continued and sufficient quantity and quality of water for current and future human uses, while maintaining ecological integrity.

4. Resources for smart growth

The following web links provide further information on the topic of smart growth:

http://www.mass.gov/envir/smart_growth_toolkit/

<http://www.ma-smartgrowth.org/>

<http://www.environmentalleague.org/news-issues-smart-growth.php>

D. Visions for Individual Topical Areas

1. Open space vision

While residential and commercial development is somewhat inevitable, the vision we have for Stow is to utilize zoning and other creative tools that will help to preserve open space. The current Zoning Bylaw and its standard Subdivision Regulations require large lot sizes for traditional residential subdivisions. This forces development to consume large amounts of open space which, when developed, become long driveways, lawns and landscaped areas, instead of being preserved in their natural state.

It is possible to direct development away from the open space parcels we wish to preserve by implementing smart growth principles. These principles recommend that you concentrate growth where development already exists.

The town has recently produced an Open Space and Recreation Plan. Further depiction of vision and goals for Open Space and Recreation are outlined in that plan, which can also be viewed at www.stow-ma.gov/pages/StowMA_BComm/StowMA_OpenSpace/index. However, the Master Plan Committee wishes to highlight the following goals in its vision for Open Space:

- Complete the Assabet River Rail Trail through Stow
- Preserve open space in underserved quadrants
- Proactively negotiate to purchase Crow Island for conservation and recreational purposes
- Address the issue of eutrophication in Lake Boon
- Encourage Low Impact Development
- Develop a process for addressing properties that are withdrawn from Chapter 61
- Secure easements to complete the “Emerald Necklace” walking trail network

2. Housing vision

Stow is a largely residential community with a distinct country character provided by numerous orchards, golf courses, forests, wetlands, and areas of open space. As a relatively old community (incorporated in 1683), Stow has a variety of housing stock, including historical dwellings, a few farms and farmhouses, typical New England single and multiple family dwellings, and limited affordable and elderly housing communities. However, the current mix of housing stock is overwhelmingly single-family detached homes (91% of all housing units) on moderate- to large-sized lots. Furthermore, like much of eastern Massachusetts, the cost of these homes has escalated dramatically with the result that these homes are not available to first-time buyers or those with modest income.

Our vision is to reestablish diversity in our community by creating housing stock where young, middle-aged, and older residents of all income levels can together share the common values

that existed in this community many years ago. Workforce housing is also desired in the community so those who work here can live near where they work.

Key priorities for housing:

- Establish a comprehensive housing policy for Stow
- Consider employing professional support for housing issues
- Create a plan that effectively uses the combined resources of Community Preservation Act funds and Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust funds for increasing our affordable housing
- Identify parcels suitable for mixed use development or dwellings suitable for preservation as affordable units
- Enact zoning changes to encourage the building of diversified housing stock

3. Economic development vision

Residents of Stow have articulated a vision for Stow's economy that is not much changed from today. The economy of Stow will continue to provide the everyday goods and services that residents need through its small businesses, independent retail shops, and network of professionals. Larger, "big box" retail will be discouraged along with malls and noxious manufacturing facilities. Land zoned for commercial activity should be a minor part of the overall land use while still leaving some select areas for non-intrusive larger facilities. The mill will be restored to use as thriving activity centers of commerce and perhaps mixed use. Finally, the golf courses will remain in their current use and not sold off for residential or more intensive commercial use.

4. Natural and cultural resource vision

Relative to Natural and Cultural Resources, the vision we imagine is a town that has extended land protection to important vistas and natural areas, especially those which have sensitive environmental habitats. It will also be a community where expanded arts and cultural opportunities are prevalent. Innovative, local and varied community-based cultural programming will exist and be supported by area residents.

5. Public facilities and municipal services vision

Like many small New England towns, Stow is likely to continue with a light-handed (and less expensive) rather than a heavy-handed (and more expensive) approach to municipal services. The MPC's vision for public facilities and municipal services is that existing needs for infrastructure, services and safety will continue to be met without incurring significant new costs. We also envision employing the Pompositticut School facilities to meet demands for an intergenerational community center, especially one that could provide a variety of useful and desirable services for the growing population of seniors.

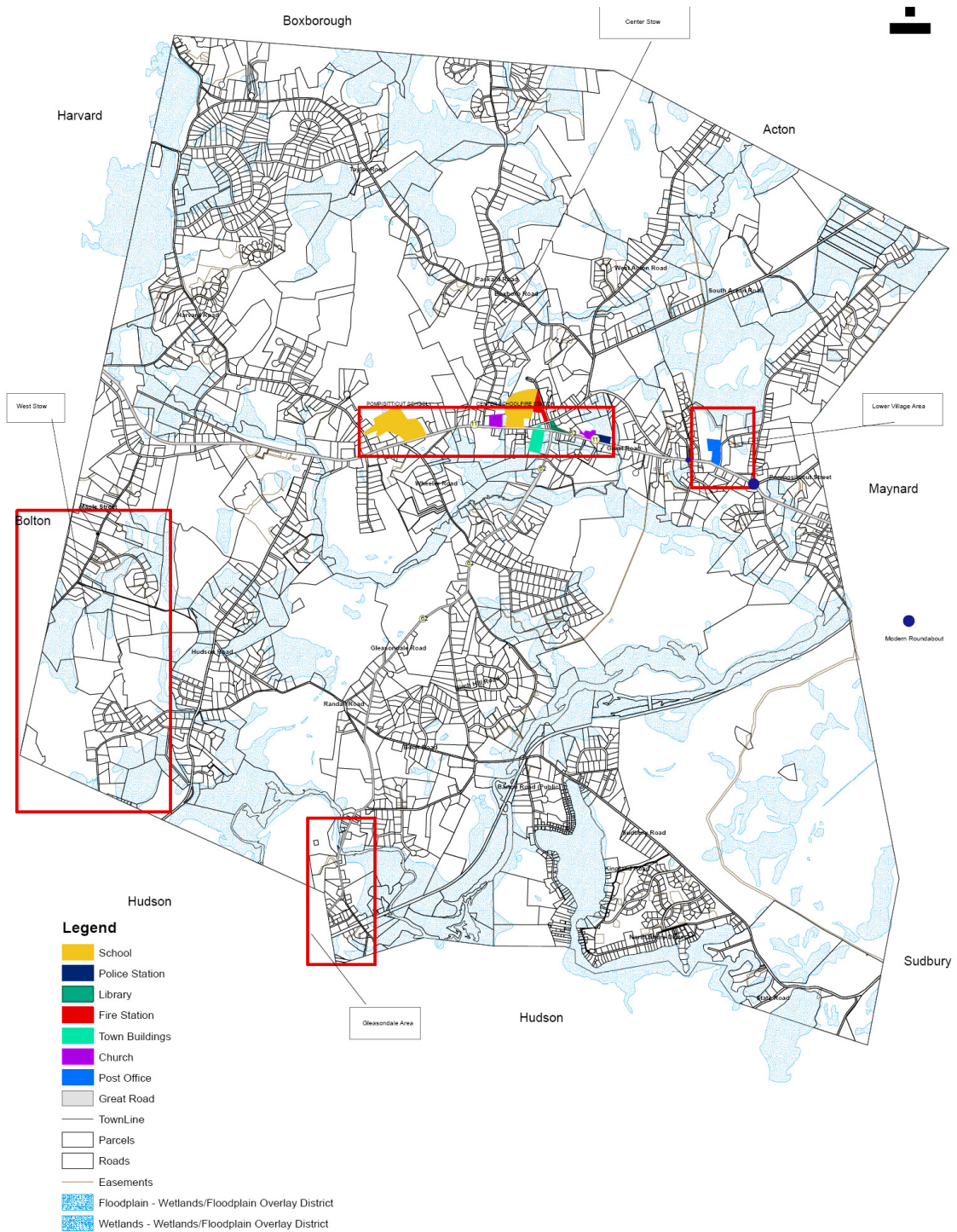
6. Transportation vision

The vision for transportation is to continue to find ways to improve upon safety and offer residents alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle. Over time, more sidewalks and trails will be built. Shuttle services for seniors will be expanded to other age groups to get to and from the train station in Acton and to other transit service connections. Car pooling, biking, and walking will be encouraged.

7. Land use and zoning vision

The vision for land use is that today's proportional mix of open space, rural, farmland, and residential use will continue virtually unchanged into the future. Stow's residents appreciate the charm associated with large amounts of green space, forests, and natural vistas. These areas will be protected where possible. Zoning, as a tool, should primarily be used to emphasize the current characteristics of Stow's land use patterns and enhance current character. Some commercial areas will be improved upon by focusing the zoning to encourage the types of development seen as desirable by the residents.

FIGURE: 2 Village map



In general, Lower Village comprises our existing commercial retail area. Gleasondale is the area of town that is noteworthy for its historic mill and Victorian period housing. The Town Center contains our Colonial period buildings, which currently house our civic center and town buildings including the library, schools, monuments, and churches. By contrast, West Stow is an area of town with a lot of recent residential development and no history as a village center.

This plan envisions building on the existing village structure to augment and enhance possibilities of smart growth and sustainable development in the following specific ways:

- For Lower Village, we see an opportunity for additional commercial activity primarily through redevelopment of underutilized parcels and infill development. The potential for additional senior housing which would be conveniently located near shopping and other amenities would also be ideal for this area. This housing could be smaller than traditional single family housing, and slightly more densely constructed to minimize use of raw land.
- The Gleasondale Mill area could lend itself well to a vision that includes artisan lofts, or mixed use development of the mill itself.
- West Stow, as it evolves, is ripe for smart growth and sustainable development.
- The Town Center is projected to remain essentially as it is now, but additional municipal uses for this area could be explored. Updating existing facilities, providing adequate parking, and generally enhancing this area is part of our vision for Town Center.

Town Center Land use and zoning priorities:

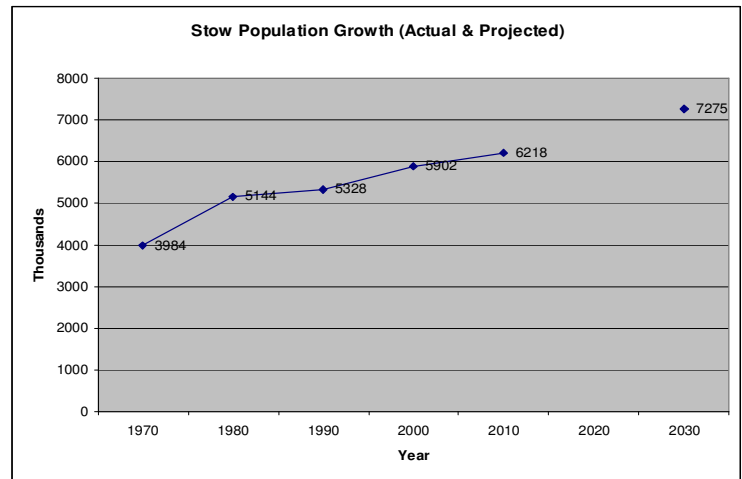
- Explore mixed use overlay districts to allow redevelopment and new development that promotes diverse housing stock
- Revitalize existing commerce
- Encourage pedestrian-friendly development
- Reduce roadway congestion
- Promote a sense of community
- Assist in the creation of common water and sewage facilities where appropriate
- Explore creative parking solutions

E. Existing Conditions – Background and Context

- Current demographics:

Population: **6,218**
Registered voters: **4,436**
School Enrollment **1,173**
Income per capita: **\$38,260**
Median Household Income
\$102,530
EQV Per Capita **\$195,088**
Estimated Jobs in Town: **2,082**

- The above chart illustrates population data derived from US and Local Census statistics and combines projections from



the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC). The most striking of the above statistics is the 56% population growth in Stow since the year 1970. Based on existing trends, the amount of available land, and Stow's location between two major highways proximate to both Boston and Worcester, MAPC predicts (in its Data Common analysis derived from US Census data) that Stow's population will grow at a rate greater than 17% between now and the year 2030. However, that same analysis projects that the job base in Stow will only grow 11-15% based in part on the relative scarcity of commercially zoned land in Stow and likely in part on the lack of water and sewer infrastructure to support large-scale commercial growth.

The Executive Office of Environmental Affairs conducted a full community wide "Build-Out analysis" in 2000 which was intended to present a picture of what the community could become if all available and usable land was developed in accordance with present zoning. That build-out analysis appears in detail in the appendix. It helps set the context for what Stow could become over time if present land use patterns remain unchanged. That analysis concluded that Stow could see around another 1100 housing units built and significant commercial square footage constructed under the present zoning scheme.

This information provides a picture of what Stow could become if full build out were achieved. It predicts that there would be an additional 3,689 residents for a new population of 9,482 at total build out and school aged children would approach numbers around 1,793. While it might take decades for Stow to approach these full build out figures, they are nonetheless important in setting the stage for what Stow could become if present conditions and zoning regulations are left untouched. Through this Master Planning process, Stow must consider if the above

statistics are acceptable or if it wishes to modify some of its planning practices to direct the communities growth in a fashion which differs from current trends.

F. Goals and Policies

1. Proceed with a transparent process

A significant number of public meetings has been devoted to the topic of revising the Master Plan over the past decade, and hundreds of people have participated along the way. Along with six public forums, the committee has met on its own more than 120 times since 2001. As is mandated in Stow, each meeting of this committee was publicly posted at least 48 hours in advance, along with an agenda.

The MPC made every effort to involve the public in the process. This campaign for public awareness of the work of the MPC began in earnest with the public forum in early February 2009, which was attended by approximately 40 town residents. Meanwhile, the MPC drafted a series of weekly installments for the *Stow Independent* summarizing various aspects of the Master Plan, such as affordable housing, economic development, open space, zoning, etc. Several of those articles which appeared in that newspaper are also included in the Appendix *(We will scan and attach)*.

2. Create opportunities for public input

In December 2008, the MPC solicited information via a townwide survey. That survey, which was available to residents both online and in hard copy, investigated every aspect of municipal life, from traffic congestion to zoning regulations and from affordable housing to recreational facilities. There was little emphasis on school-related priorities simply because those priorities are established by the Nashoba Regional School District. Also, Stow's Elementary School Building Committee was engaged in its own planning process, and we wished to avoid the cost and confusion of duplication of effort.

In February 2009, the MPC held a public forum to discuss the survey results, measure them against the interests of meeting attendees, and gauge the town's involvement and interest in the process. During an extensive mapping exercise done in small groups, useful information emerged concerning use of our town resources and options we all face in terms of future development.

3. Involve multiple stakeholders

The Board of Selectmen was responsible for appointing members to the MPC. They chose representatives from each of the other major boards in town: the Board of Health, the Finance Committee, the Conservation Commission, and the Planning Board. In addition, one Selectman was named to the committee, as were two members-at-large. Most of the members were long-

time Stow residents with a wealth of knowledge and institutional memory about town issues as well as a deep-seated commitment to the town's future. Each member of the MPC brought the interests of his or her committee to the table along with personal knowledge of the community.

In March, the MPC began an ongoing process of inviting various stakeholders to its biweekly meetings. Each invited group was urged to send at least one or two representatives of the group to discuss special interests with the MPC. When necessary, members of the MPC represented the views of the other committees on which they served. This series of meetings brought the MPC face to face with the Open Space Committee, the Recreation Commission, the Fire Chief, the Police Chief, the Board of Health, the Land Use Task Force and the Town Administrator for in-depth discussions about how their respective needs could best be met by a revised Master Plan.

4. Provide opportunities for public comment

The MPC first issued a draft of the Master Plan in February 2008. Public response to the draft suggested the need for considerably more input and discussions, which touched off an expansive revision process. By bringing in a municipal management consulting firm, the MPC leveraged professional input to streamline the process and ensure the use of industry-recognized best practices. Working with consultants, the MPC began drafting revised chapters of the Master Plan in April 2009, and began rolling out chapters of the new draft in late summer, with a complete draft available for public review and a 30-day comment period beginning in March 2010. The MPC then produced the final version, which is expected to be subsequently adopted by the Planning Board.